

## **OFFICIALS PREPARE FOR WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON GLOBAL LITERACY**

**By**  
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**WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 14** -- Officials from the White House and the U.S. State Department met with staff members from embassies around the world to discuss the upcoming White House Conference on Global Literacy, which will be held in New York City on September 18.

At the informal briefing, held September 6, Anita McBride, chief of staff to first lady Laura Bush, welcomed the officials and told them the first lady takes her role of honorary ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade "very, very seriously" and wants to make a contribution by hosting a major event to highlight successful literacy programs from around the world.

Invitations to the literacy conference targeted first ladies, first spouses and ministers of education from countries with large populations or high illiteracy rates. According to U.S. officials, to date, roughly 25 first ladies and 40 ministers of education have responded that they will attend. At the September 6 briefing, questions from staff members from the embassies of Trinidad/Tobago, Mozambique, Honduras, Bulgaria, Jordan and several other countries were answered.

Laura Bush will give remarks to open and close the global conference, which will be held at the New York Public Library. The first lady takes a particular interest in improving the literacy of women and girls around the world and has spoken on the topic in visits this year in Afghanistan, Liberia and Ghana.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 771 million adults around the globe cannot

read, and more than two-thirds of those without adequate literacy skills are women. UNESCO reports that 100 million children do not attend school and that the vast majority of them are in 35 countries, in regions affected by the highest poverty.

The conference will include three panels that will present nine literacy programs from nine countries. The first panel will cover mother-child literacy and intergenerational learning and will be moderated by U.S. Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings. The second will discuss the positive effects literacy has on health and will be moderated by Randall Tobias, director of foreign assistance and administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development. The third will discuss the role literacy plays in achieving economic self-sufficiency and will be moderated by Gerri Elliott, vice-president of Microsoft Corporation.

The conference will be delivered in seven languages and will include a luncheon at which attendees can share their reactions and ideas.

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*Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available from the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section (Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov); Website: [http:// dhaka.usembassy.gov](http://dhaka.usembassy.gov))*